



Music Review: *Princes Amongst Men - Journeys With Gypsy Musicians*

Written by Richard Marcus Published May 17, 2008

Princes Amongst Men features the music of some of the best known performers from the four countries that Cartwright travelled through, performers that he spent time with and came to know personally.

While bands like Taraf de Haidouks and Fanfare Ciocarlia have achieved some name recognition in Western Europe and North America through touring and appearances in movies, (Taraf de Haidouks appeared alongside Johnny Depp in *The Man Who Cried* and he has become one of their biggest champions in the West), others on the disc won't be as well known to audiences outside of their own countries.

Individuals like Fetus Mustafov and bands like the Docani Orkestar from Macedonia; Boban Markovic and Ekrem from Serbia; Sofi Marinova and Boril Illiev from Bulgaria; and Romica Fuceanu and Fulgerica from Romania, are names that probably won't be familiar to many people west of the Balkans, but whose music is every bit as redolent with the fire and passion that has made their more well known brethren so beloved by those who know them.

While I'm probably somewhat more familiar with Gypsy music than the majority of people, I would by no means call myself more than an appreciative fan. More than half the names on this disc were unknown to me. In the past I've really only ever had the opportunity to hear Romanian music, and only the occasional performer from the other countries. So this disc was full of pleasant surprises for me. I'd not had the opportunity of hearing the four country's different styles juxtaposed before, so I was interested to note the subtle differences that showed up in the music.

While there was the obvious differences in languages between the four, I began to notice traits that, judging by this disc, could be considered characteristics of the four countries. While I've grown used to the hell bent for leather approach that both Taruf and Fanfare take to their music, (if you've seen the movie *Borat* you'll have heard Fanfare's version of "Born To Be Wild" which makes Steppenwolf's original look like it was recorded in slow motion) and the Romanian appreciation for speed and agility in their music in general. While the other countries retained some of that feeling of abandon, there were also elements that changed the tempos and gave them a different feel.

For instance on the CD's opening track, "Cocek Shutka" by Sudahan from Macedonia it was hard not to miss the the Middle Eastern influences that gave it a very distinct Arabic sound. It was followed on the disc by the almost Mexican sounding trumpet that marked the song "Molitva" by Serbia's Ekrem. That this plaintive trumpet was driven along by something that sounded slightly akin to a polka beat made the tune all the more distinct.

Bulgaria's Joey Illiev, on the other hand, combines some elements from the other traditions and adds some distinct flavours of his own. The clarinet that accompanies him matches his Arabic sounding vocals, yet there are Flamenco undertones to his music that can't be ignored.

It's quite amazing when you think about how close the four countries are geographically, and yet how they each seemed to have developed different flavours to what some people might consider one type of music. If there's one lesson to be learned from the CD *Princes Amongst Men - Journeys With Gypsy Musicians* it's that there is no such thing as one type of Gypsy music. It is as distinct as the individuals who play it and the countries where it is played.

For those who've not had the joy and the privilege of hearing the diversity of sound that is Gypsy music, and specifically Gypsy music from the Balkans, they won't find a better introduction to this exciting world than this CD.